New Mexico
Kirtland AFB

Facility and Location

Kirtland Air Force Base (AFB) is located in Albuquerque and opened in the late 1930s as an Army Air Corps training field. During 1943 to 1944, the base's three schools, advanced flying, bombardier training, and the multi-engine school operated at full capacity. In 1945, Kirtland Field was engaged in training combat crews for the B-29, with the training continuing until the end of World War II.

In 1946, Kirtland AFB was placed under the Air Materiel Command and its flying training activities were halted. Its new mission entailed flight test activities for the Manhattan Engineering District, the wartime organization that produced the atomic bomb. The base's new role was to develop proper aircraft modifications for weapons delivery and to determine ballistic characteristics for nuclear weapons. Most of the weapons testing was conducted on a 46,000-acre tract in the Manzano Mountains on the southern part of Kirtland AFB which included Forest Service lands withdrawn for testing purposes. Kirtland AFB was considered ideal because of its proximity to Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory and to Sandia Base where DoD had established the Armed Forces Special Weapons Command to direct military employment of the new weapons to be built. Munitions maintenance activities and explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) activities have been conducted at Kirtland AFB.

Kirtland AFB is currently home to the 377th Combat Support Wing which provides munitions maintenance, readiness, and base operating support. In addition, it hosts elements of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA). DTRA is the DoD focal point for programs and activities to reduce the threats posed to the U.S. by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Media Sampled and Findings

Drinking Water — Prior to 2007, samples of groundwater used for drinking water supplies taken at the entry point to the drinking water distribution system reported no detection.
Groundwater — In 2011, three of three samples detected perchlorate from 15 to 27 ppb. In 2010, five of five samples detected perchlorate from 0.41 to 2.7 ppb. In 2009, four of five samples detected perchlorate from 0.45 to 0.52 ppb. In 2008, 39 of 39 samples detected perchlorate from 0.02 to 11 ppb. Prior to 2007, 15 of 37 samples detected perchlorate from 0.2 to 16 ppb.
Soil — Prior to 2007, one sample from the EOD range area and one sample from the DTRA Chestnut site detected perchlorate at 16,200 and 33,000 ppb.

Appropriate Actions

Groundwater samples were above the EPA and DoD Preliminary Remediation Goal of 15 ppb. Projects have been programmed to further investigate the source of the perchlorate at the EOD Hill Well and monitoring wells are being installed in the aquifer at Site WP-26 where perchlorate was detected in previous year’s sampling.

Past soil samples were not found above EPA Region VI soil screening levels of 55,000 ppb residential and 720,000 ppb industrial. Kirtland AFB has discussed the soil sampling results at an operational range with the state regulatory agency, but no actions have been required to date and no pathway to drinking water has been determined.